

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE COORDINATED PLAN

The primary purpose of the Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan) is to improve coordination among transportation providers to better meet the transportation needs of seniors and people with disabilities. It guides applicants in the Boston region in developing their proposals for the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Section 5310, *Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program*. In Massachusetts this program is known as the *Community Transit Grant Program* (CTGP). The CTGP provides funding for projects that meet the transportation needs of seniors and people with disabilities when existing transportation services are unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meet these needs.

As the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Boston area regional planning association, the Boston Region MPO develops the Coordinated Plan for the 97 municipalities within its region. Figure ES-1 shows the municipalities within the MPO region.

APPLYING FOR THE COMMUNITY TRANSIT GRANT PROGRAM

In Massachusetts, the state Department of Transportation manages the application process for the CTGP, which is a competitive grant program with an annual application process. Organizations eligible to apply for CTGP funding include local government, private nonprofit organizations, and public transit operators—the Massachusetts Department of Transportation may also use 5310 funding to administer and implement state-prioritized projects. This 2023 update to the Coordinated Plan replaces the MPO's 2019 Coordinated Plan and should be referred to in CTGP applications beginning with the state fiscal year 2025 application cycle.

To be considered for CTGP funding, projects located within the MPO region must address a transportation need, strategy, or action identified in chapter four of this Coordinated Plan. Table ES-2 (Table 4-2 in chapter 4 in the main document) lists the human service transit needs for the region, as well as strategies and actions to meet those needs; a proposed project that addresses the needs, strategies, or actions that would be considered “included” in the Coordinated Plan. Given the large and diverse nature of the Boston region, the transportation needs, strategies, and actions described in this Coordinated Plan are broad in order to elicit a range of project proposals that are likely to address unmet human service transportation needs.

Projects eligible for the CTGP include both traditional capital projects and nontraditional projects. Traditional capital projects include the purchase or lease of vehicles for human service transportation that are carried out to meet the special transportation needs of seniors and people with disabilities when public transit is insufficient, inappropriate, or unavailable, as well as support facilities like benches and shelters. Nontraditional projects can include volunteer driver programs, wayfinding, and travel training, among others.

EXISTING PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICES

There are a wide variety of public transit services in the Boston region, which can be explored in more detail in this interactive [web map](#). These include

- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority;
- regional transit authorities;
- Massachusetts Port Authority;
- transportation management associations;
- private, nonprofit services, such as those run by hospitals and universities;
- long-distance transportation providers, such as Amtrak and Peter Pan;
- municipal services; and
- volunteer driver programs.

Public transit—both human service transportation and transit that serves the general population—in the Boston region can often be disconnected, especially outside of the immediate Boston area. Services are run by many different transit providers, with their own fares, eligibility requirements, and service areas. These may or may not be coordinated with other providers with adjacent services, sometimes leading to long wait times, high fares, or simply the inability to reach a particular part of the region at all by public transit. These challenges are magnified in towns further from Boston, as the public transit network is more limited in these areas, despite the often many seniors and people with disabilities who live there. Improved coordination of services and closing the gaps in existing services, through funding such as the CTGP, is critical for addressing the unmet human service transportation needs in the Boston region.

BOSTON REGION DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding current and future demographics of seniors and people with disabilities helps identify gaps in services and communities where transportation needs may be highest. In the Boston MPO Region, 16 percent of people are 65 or older, while 10 percent have a disability. There is significant overlap between these populations: nearly 50 percent of seniors have a disability. These populations are expected to increase in the coming decades—demographic projections from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute suggest that by 2050, about 20 percent of the population will be aged 65 or older. This is a 37 percent increase over the 2020 population, compared to a 10 percent increase for the total population in the MPO region. While demographic projections for people with disabilities are not available, it is reasonable to assume that this population will increase as the senior population does so.

IDENTIFYING UNMET TRANSPORTATION NEEDS, STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THEM, AND PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To help identify unmet human service transportation needs, MPO staff conducted extensive public engagement to get input from seniors and people with disabilities, people who work with these populations, and human service transportation providers. Staff used this input to then develop strategies and actions that transportation providers in the region could undertake to address these needs and identified those that might be priorities for the Boston region.

Public engagement was conducted concurrently with engagement for the development of the MPO's 2023 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), *Destination 2050*, during which staff collected input about transportation needs and priorities in the region. Most engagement activities during the development of the LRTP and the Coordinated Plan between 2019 and 2023 were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

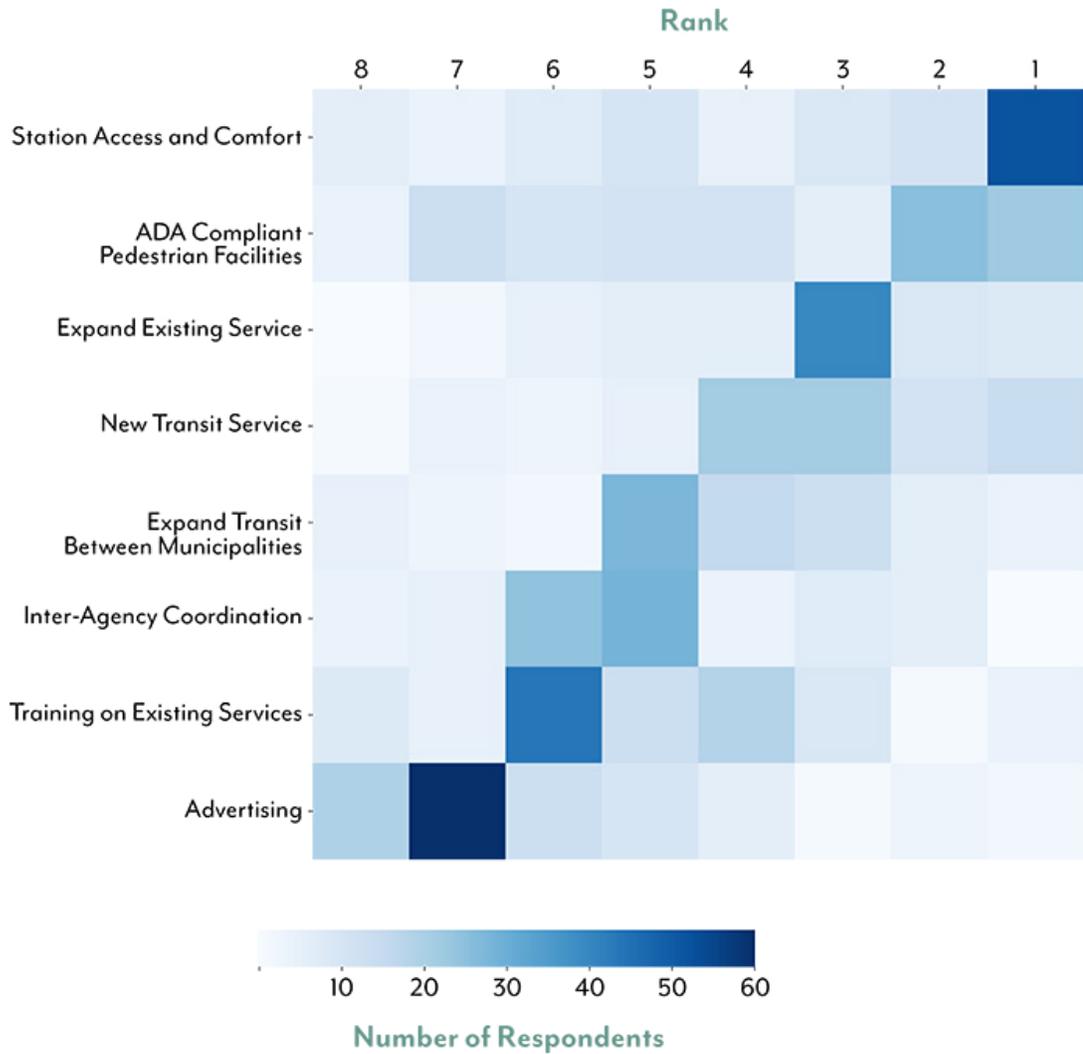
Staff also conducted several engagement activities focused directly on the Coordinated Plan to collect input. These included meetings with Regional Coordinating Councils; discussions focused on human service transportation needs with the MPO's Transit Working Group and Advisory Council; a human service transportation coordination workshop with councils on aging, disability commissions, and transit providers; and a survey about human service transportation needs.

The survey—which was distributed to organizations that work with seniors and people with disabilities, human service transportation providers, and the general public, with a focus on getting input from these populations—was conducted in spring of 2023. Respondents were asked to identify their top human service transportation needs and select the top strategies that would help meet those needs. This was asked across four categories: infrastructure, public transit, coordination, and education improvements. The four most commonly selected strategies were

- Provide training opportunities for older adults and people with disabilities to learn which transportation services are available and how to use them (32.7 percent)
- Improve accessibility and comfort at transit stations and stops (with features such as high-level platforms, elevators, escalators, benches, and bus stop shelters) (31.5 percent)
- Ensure that sidewalks and street crossings adjacent to public transit stations and stops are safe and ADA-compliant (30.0 percent)
- Develop collaborations and partnerships between transit service providers, including rideshare companies, to more efficiently meet common needs (29.0 percent)

Respondents were then asked to rank their selected strategies from highest to lowest priority. The two most frequently selected strategies from each category are shown in Figure ES-2—the darkest blue indicates when a strategy was most frequently ranked in that category.

FIGURE ES-2
RANKING OF STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE HUMAN SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION



ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act.

FINDINGS FROM PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: NEEDS AND STRATEGIES

Transportation needs and strategies and actions to address them that were identified through public engagement were grouped into the following topic areas:

- **Transportation Service Improvements:** expansion, maintenance, and overall improvements of public transit services (including new routes, increased frequency, and expanded operating hours)
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** maintaining existing or constructing new transportation infrastructure
- **Vehicle Improvements:** improving vehicle accessibility
- **Public Engagement and Education:** involvement and education of members of the public on transportation services
- **Inter-Agency Coordination:** coordination between transportation providers
- **Housing:** consideration of coordinating housing with transportation improvements to provide greater access to human service transportation
- **Operating Challenges:** improvements in the operation of human service transportation, including customer service, funding, and scheduling
- **Eligibility:** eligibility requirements for human service transportation
- **Affordability:** out-of-pocket costs of human service transportation

Table ES-1 shows the needs, strategies, actions, and resources to support them by topic area.

TABLE ES-1
UNMET HUMAN SERVICE TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THEM

Topic Area	Unmet Needs	Strategies and Actions
Transportation Service Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver shortage • Service hours during evenings and weekends • Reliability and functionality of paratransit • More access to public transportation • On-demand service expansion • Services limited by geography and destinations • First- and last-mile connections to larger transportation hubs • Service availability for social and/or non-medical trips • Return trips for medical appointments • Transit service to connect municipalities without traveling Boston • Short-notice trips • Greater frequency of fixed-route services • Lack of flexibility and reliability • Regional disparities in service • Restrooms and personal care facilities at public transit stations • Services that accommodate an aging population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity of paratransit system • Support first- and last-mile projects • Improve accessibility of public transit to reduce the demand for The RIDE and similar services • Merge existing services for seniors and people with disabilities • Prioritize investments in public transportation improvements over private services • Expanded COA shuttle services • Provide dedicated, non-medical transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities • Prioritize improvements that serve seniors and people with disabilities • Peer organizations build partnerships • Build transit stops near senior housing • Merge existing, redundant services • Community-based transportation service from places of residences to community centers • Add more transit stops by senior centers, senior housing, and medical centers • Pursue public-private partnerships to provide on-call transportation for same-day transportation needs • Mapping the existing regional human service transportation network to identify gaps • Offer education sessions or materials to outline resources to human service transportation users • Install electronic next bus signs for real-time service updates • Increase rolling stock for human service transportation services • Utilize COA vans for transportation services with increased eligibility • Provide regular training and check-ins with volunteer networks

Topic Area	Unmet Needs	Strategies and Actions
Infrastructure Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connected, well-maintained, ADA-accessible sidewalk network • Maintenance of sidewalks and street crossings during inclement weather events • Amenities at bus stops and transit stations, such as lighting, benches, or shelters, as well as accessibility infrastructure, such as ramps¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce gaps in sidewalk network in proximity to public transportation stops and stations • Ensure stations and stops meet ADA requirements • Remove debris on sidewalks and transit stops during inclement weather events • Design new stations and do renovations that include high-level platforms
Vehicle Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space in vehicles to allow for personal care attendant, service animal, and/or other escort • Insufficient rolling stock • Amenities on public transportation vehicles to accommodate mobility devices and accessible seating • Simple signage and information system on vehicle interior and exterior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share vehicles across municipal boundaries • Improve suspension on paratransit vehicles to reduce passenger injuries • Purchase additional paratransit vehicles • Contract with ambulances to assist with transportation • Assign more space on public transit vehicles specifically for seniors and people with disabilities
Public Engagement and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training on existing services, including fixed-route and on-demand services • Access to services without smartphone technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate seniors and people with disabilities about available transportation options • Advertising campaigns • Maintain communications that don't rely on smart phone technology • Include human service transportation users in the transportation planning and design process • Budget to include community engagement in implementation and operation costs • Provide training to help adult drivers transition from car-use to public transit
Inter-Agency Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities, particularly outside of the Inner Core, with little to no RTA service • Long transfer times across municipal and RTA boundaries • Turnover in implementing agencies results in a need for succession planning and the retention of institutional knowledge • Difficult to coordinate longer trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate services across municipal boundaries • Expand community transit options • Build partnerships with RTAs, COAs, and other community partners • Develop regional coordination between paratransit providers • Share best practices and lessons learned with peer agencies • Merge human service transportation programs and reimburse expenses based on usage • Contract with RTAs for vans and other resources • Coordinate with school bus companies to share pool of drivers • Develop efficient transfer points between RTAs • Create a unified dispatch center to increase the options available to passengers • Integrate scheduling and fare structures

Topic Area	Unmet Needs	Strategies and Actions
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car-dependent senior housing developments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in walkable and livable communities • Construct senior housing developments near transit stations • Connect transit service to existing developments
Operating Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver shortages • Policies to protect the increased vulnerability to viral and/or airborne diseases of human service transportation passengers • Well-trained dispatch service • Door-to-door transportation • Communication with passengers with limited English proficiency • Communication of delays • Long sign-up process • Insufficient funding to meet all needs • High start-up cost to services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve driver recruitment, training, and retention efforts • Streamline TNC same-day/on-demand services • Utilize innovative financing options (for example, partnering with private companies, such as insurance companies, to pay for medical trips) • Advocate for additional funding availability to legislature and other decision-makers • Increase municipal partnerships with The RIDE and other paratransit services • Include vehicle operators in the transportation planning process • Include vehicle operators in human service transportation user forums, such as the Riders' Transportation Access Group • Translate signage into multiple languages and/or utilize visual communication methods to accommodate individuals with LEP • Expand volunteer driver programs • Coordinate with other municipalities or agencies to jointly apply for funding
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service gaps from human service transportation programs limited to certain groups of people • Expanding human service transportation qualification for people with hidden disabilities or short-term disabilities • Non-emergency medical transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate human service transportation services and remove eligibility barriers • Expand rider eligibility requirements on existing services
Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cost of on-demand transportation services • High cost of fixed-route rapid transit and commuter rail services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing municipal support channels to facilitate reduced fare distribution and education • Free, reduced fare, or voucher programs • Subsidize private, on-demand service trips for older adults and people with disabilities

ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act. COA = councils on aging. LEP = limited English proficiency. RTA = regional transit agency. TNC = transportation network company.

¹ While funding of benches and shelters are allowed under federal 5310 guidelines, as a practice, it is not part of the state Community Transit Grant Program. Other funding opportunities that may support these are listed in table 4-3 or may seek support from their regional transit authority.

FINDINGS FROM PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

While this Coordinated Plan does not attempt to dictate which strategies and actions should receive funding, it does describe priorities for the Boston region based on how frequently needs were identified during the public engagement process to support the development of applications for CTGP. More than one-half of all comments received spoke of transportation service improvements, with the next most common topic areas infrastructure improvements and inter-agency coordination. Some of the key takeaways from this input include

- **Coordinating public transit services.** Human service transportation users report the challenge of long, inconvenient transfer times, especially outside of Boston and immediately surrounding communities. In addition, current services have a variety of eligibility requirements and service areas, which result in the creation of service gaps.
- **Improving and maintaining transportation accessibility.** Many respondents noted inaccessible sidewalks near transit stations, blocked pedestrian facilities during inclement weather events, and limited accessible space on vehicles. Improving the accessibility of general public transit can help to alleviate the demand of paratransit and other human service transportation-specific offerings.
- **Expanding service.** Respondents indicated a desire for human service transportation services to operate throughout the evening and weekends. In addition, respondents spoke of difficulty accessing medical services in different municipalities than the one in which they reside.
- **Improving the customer experience.** A recurring theme from engagement is the need to improve driver training and retention strategies, include human service transportation users in planning processes, and create a centralized roster of available services. Respondents spoke of the vulnerability of human service transportation users and advocated expanding driver training to best support seniors and people with disabilities.

This Coordinated Plan updates and replaces the Boston Region MPO's 2019 Coordinated Plan starting with the state fiscal year 2025 CTGP grant cycle. This document will be updated again in four years in concert with the Boston MPO's next planned LRTP update, per federal guidance.